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## Influx of ER visits reported following lifted 'do not use' advisories

by [Marcus Constantino](#)

Daily Mail Staff

Advertiser

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Area emergency rooms are seeing an influx of patients reporting symptoms related to exposure to chemical-tainted water, despite the fact that West Virginia American Water has deemed water in many areas safe to use.

Rahul Gupta, health officer for the Kanawha-Charleston Health Department, said 101 patients visited area emergency rooms in the 36-hour span ending at 7 a.m. Wednesday morning, reporting symptoms related to exposure to tainted water. He said 46 of those allegedly water-related emergency room visits occurred between 7 p.m. Tuesday night and 7 a.m. Wednesday morning.

"What we are seeing when we talk to our partners in hospital systems are people with skin and eye irritation, rashes, nausea, upset stomach and diarrhea," Gupta said.

All of those symptoms have been connected with exposure to crude MCHM, the chemical that leaked from a Freedom Industries storage tank Thursday into the Elk River, and then into West Virginia American Water's Charleston treatment plant a mile and a half downstream.

Gupta said many of those patients reported using water that was deemed safe to use by West Virginia American Water. As of Wednesday afternoon, the "do not use" order has been lifted for 51,600 of the 100,000 customers affected by the chemical spill.

Janet Briscoe, director of epidemiology and threat preparedness, said this data is based on information provided by patients. No diagnoses have been made directly correlating patients' symptoms to exposure to tap water.

Gupta stopped short of saying whether he thought the water supply in areas that have been cleared are safe or unsafe for use or consumption. He said he has "no reason to doubt" West Virginia American Water's recommendation that water is safe to use in zones that have been lifted from the "do not use" advisory.

"Having said that, people need to understand they need to make their own individual decisions out there," Gupta said. "That's up to them. But as far as the data and recommendations we have from West Virginia American Water, the water is safe to use.

"We're not saying it's safe. West Virginia American Water is saying it's safe. We are taking their word for it," Gupta said.

Gupta said those who have pre-existing allergies, migraines or asthma may be more sensitive to low amounts of crude MCHM in their water.

Briscoe said the Kanawha-Charleston Health Department is reaching out to state and federal agencies to study the longterm health and environmental impacts of the chemical.